

# CATALYST



Business Strategy | Marketing Communications

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## Simple, But Not Easy

*By Tom Marx*

What does this mean? How can something be simple, but not easy?

I first learned the phrase *Simple, But Not Easy* about twelve years ago from Lew Epstein, a very important mentor in my life. Lew founded an organization called the Lew Epstein Men's and Women's Clubs. He would listen to a personal challenge from a member of the Club. Because Lew's listening was so generous, the club member would often arrive at his or her own resolution through the process of telling his or her story at a club meeting. Though this insight was at first obscure, once realized, it felt obvious. Then Lew, in all his wisdom, would smile, fold his hands in front of him, and say "Yes, it's simple, but not easy."

It took me quite a while to really understand the significance of this statement (I still forget from time to time): a solution to a challenge may appear to be very simple, but getting to the solution is often quite complicated.

Simplicity can be deceiving. It can lend one towards lazy thinking. What you see - what's most obvious - is the mountain. What isn't so obvious is the climb. Keeping your focus on getting to the top of the mountain might blind you to the twists and turns in the road ahead. You have to pay attention to the journey. This takes planning, determination, a keen attention to detail and some very hard work.

Take my Mt. Whitney trip for example. The idea of getting up the mountain seemed simple enough; there's the mountain; I've wanted to climb this mountain since I was a kid; I'm going to do it! But what did it take for me to get there?

### **Planning**

I could only hike on this trail with a Wilderness Permit. I filed for the permit in November of last year, a lottery was held mid-February and I was notified the beginning of March. That left just a few months to handle getting into the best physical condition for the hike, find the right team, and plan for as many contingencies as I could think of.

### **Determination**

Finding a team was another simple objective, but with everyday life and normal business commitments, this process was not so easy. Nevertheless, I knew I could not do this alone. If I was going to safely

reach the summit, I needed the intelligence and resources of experienced backpackers. My commitment was to choose the right partners.

### **Attention to Detail**

In the period from March until August, there was constant organizing and communications. While we were committed to organizing ourselves to bring a minimum of equipment, we still had to pay attention to what supplies to bring, as well as designing a workout schedule to build strength, phone meetings, email conversations, collaborating with six different personal calendars - and organizing a drive of over three hundred fifty miles to get to the trail head.

### **Hard Work**

After many months of planning and organizing I felt ready to make the climb. Still, once we arrived at the foot of the mountain, the actual climb took four days and three nights. Gaining over six-thousand vertical feet and over eleven miles, the altitude of the High Sierra wilderness was a major challenge.

### **Paying Attention to the Journey**

This is the key to any successful endeavor, whether it's climbing a mountain or designing a marketing project. Making a goal to increase revenue by twenty percent is simple. Determining the most powerful marketing tactic, designing the right team, getting the alignment of all stakeholders before any creative work is done, fashioning a creative brief that communicates and pays attention to the myriad of details -- these are what make for a successful journey.